

Howard County Commission for Transitioning Students with Disabilities
Meeting Minutes
March 11, 2021

Attendees:

Stephanie Adibe, Missie Baxter, Beth Benevides, Patrick Boxall, Naysha Conway-Hart, Lea Fant, Stephanie Hayes, Katie Collins-Ihrke, Kathy Land, Erica Lewis, Dianne Nagle, Susan Potts, Dawson Robertson, Ann Scholz, Meghan Smallwood, Dana Stewart

Guests: Natalie Dohner (Project SEARCH), Betsy Hein (Accessible Resources for Independence), Doris Jacobs (Humanim)

Absent:

Alexandra Berry, Ernestine Bridges, Stephanie Discepolo, Michelle Henry, Colette Jackson, Judi Olinger, Cindy Parr, Mercedes Peterman, Kelly Ruby, Jemira Sarratt, Janice Yetter

Meeting called to order at 8:35 a.m.

Welcome and Introductions

B. Benevides welcomed Commission members and shared the agenda.

Approval of Minutes

Katie Collins-Ihrke made a motion to approve the January 14, 2021, minutes. M. Baxter seconded the motion. Minutes were approved unanimously.

Membership

S. Adibe updated members on the status of membership. A. Berry (individual) received her appointment. K. Land (community member, Service Coordination) still awaits confirmation, as well as a parent member who was recommended in January 2020. S. Adibe will follow up. Currently two vacancies remain in the business community. In July 2021, three parent member positions will need to be filled.

County issued a press release on the Commission vacancies in late February. Letters of interest and applications are due March 26. A. Scholz included in the Family Support and Resource Center email newsletter. M. Baxter and A. Scholz will share announcement with Instructional Team Leaders in middle and high schools. D. Robertson will share with transition teachers. K. Collins-Ihrke will share with families of students enrolled in Pre-ETS. K. Land offered to share with DDA coordinators of community services.

The Department of Community Resources and Services (DCRS) remains heavily invested in COVID vaccine access and distribution. The county is offering \$1m in grant funding to organizations who are involved in outreach and vaccine awareness, and to organizations or individuals interested in vaccine distribution. Grant RFP will be available soon.

DCRS is taking the lead in community outreach to provide equitable access to the vaccine. Partnering with faith community leaders to develop clinics. Focused on reaching eldest and most vulnerable in population, especially those who do not have access to technology to make appointments online, or who have transportation or mobility issues.

K. Collins-Ihrke mentioned the challenges with equitable vaccine access. Though people with IDD have been prioritized, individuals with physical disabilities have been left out. Though they may not qualify under IDD, they are still at increased risk. S. Adibe offered to talk further about this issue. Perhaps the mobile integrated health team can help.

HCPSS Update: High Schools and Transitioning Students with Disabilities

M. Baxter provided updates. Students with IEPs who have chosen to return to in-person learning are in schools Monday-Friday, with a half-day on Wednesday. About 50% of students remain virtual countywide; this number is similar for students receiving special education. At high-school level, more students are choosing to return in the hybrid model—just two days in-person beginning in late-March and rolling out through April.

M. Baxter complemented Stephanie Hayes for all the work she has found for transitioning youth from employers in the community—among them, My Pre-K Box (assembling and packing boxes for mailing), Rec & Parks, internal health offices (resupplying PPE), as well as Cornerstone Realty (brochures/mailers).

The number of workshops offered to families has doubled. Coming up are workshops on DDA and the transition timeline, DDA for students at Cedar Lane (4/21), as well as Alternatives to Guardianship (5/4). M. Smallwood has organized several of these workshops. In addition, a workshop on Person-Centered Planning will be offered by Shared Support to middle school students and families (4/27).

Exiting seniors are able to participate in pre-ETS workshops offered by ARI. Also exploring apprenticeship opportunities and connecting with the Office of Workforce Development.

M. Baxter shared that IEP teams will have conversations with every student about COVID recovery plans. Exiting students will be the first to discuss recovery services, which can be extended beyond age 21 and the exit from the school building. There is legislation in the current legislative session to extend school for one additional year for transitioning youth who traditionally would exit this year, but who may not have received all services due to the COVID public health emergency and school closures.

N. Dohner updated members on Project SEARCH. Interns are back in the building (Berger Road); county government internship sites remain closed. Interns are currently volunteering at the Food Bank and the Community Action Council, and looking for paid work opportunities as well. The CCE partnership with Freetown Farms has provided PS interns with an opportunity to plant seeds at the ARL greenhouse for later transfer to Freetown Farms. Applications for the 2021-22 cohort were due by March 5. Interviews and skills assessments will be done virtually in May.

Service Coordination / DDA

K. Land shared that DDA received an extension of Appendix K, which is an amendment to DDA waivers that allows for changes in services due to COVID-19. For students transitioning this year (exiting school in June), submission of person-centered plans and budgets is now possible.

Division of Rehabilitative Services (DORS)

M. Peterman and L. Fant shared that effective April 5, 2021, DORS will once again support the option of in-person Pre-ETS (which will include support of employer based Work Based Learning Experiences). All partners should have received an email from the agency regarding this update. In-person Pre-ETS programming must follow all federal and state guidance regarding safe practices. DORS will continue to support the delivery of previously approved virtual services, as well.

The agency is preparing to have staff return to the office in early April. Will start with at least two staff persons in the office per day. Consumers will be able to return by appointment only and will require screening/temperature testing in order to attend appointments at the DORS office. DORS staff will continue to have the option of virtual appointments.

Project Access / HCC

D. Nagle shared that Project Access will be offered virtually in the summer. Application is online and due by May 15, 2021. Interviews are beginning for applications already received. Reminder that Project Access is open to students outside of Howard County as well. Any student grades 9-12 may apply.

Howard County Recreation and Parks

S. Potts shared that programs will remain on virtual platforms through the summer. This does not include summer camps—outdoor summer camps will likely be offered in-person, but at smaller capacity than usual; indoor summer camps depend on space availability in school buildings.

The Playground for All at Blandair Park is in very final stages. Communication boards (with Braille) and family restrooms being added now. There will be a dedication ceremony for the communication boards from HCAS on April 1. A memorial plaque will be added for Laura Wetherald. Rec & Parks is purchasing additional communication boards for Centennial North.

Another new project is adding sensory pathways in the parks. Currently piloting this program. Created with sidewalk chalk and each pathway includes 12 elements (such as bumble bee tiptoe, river crossing). There is one currently at Meadowbrook Park. There will be an autism awareness event on April 10 at Robinson Nature Center.

Providers

N. Conway-Hart (Humanim) shared that reopening plans are currently in the works; hope to have in-person services for the summer; virtual will continue to be offered.

D. Jacobs (Humanim) shared that transitioning youth participating in afterschool programs (Start on Success and Student Career Choices) are doing well and continue in the virtual environment. The STEP VR program currently has some students working in paid competitive employment in the community.

K. Collins-Ihrke (ARI) shared that ARI will offer remote services as well as in-person services once the ARI staff is vaccinated. PPE goody bags (safety supplies) are still available to Howard County residents with disabilities for free. ARI also has Chromebooks available for those in need who wish to further their independence. ARI is assisting with skill-building in the Autism Hiring Program at the Howard County Autism Society. ARI has partnered with Spirit Club to offer exercise classes (Th/F 4:30-5:00pm); includes yoga, cardio, and adaptable exercises.

Member Updates

P. Boxall shared that the Autism Hiring Program coordinated by the Howard County Autism Society is recruiting its second cohort of job-seekers; applications are due by March 15. The Autism Hiring Program was created to address the needs of adults with autism who have high-level, marketable skills and would benefit from skills assessment, interview preparation and social navigation for a more competitive advantage. At the same time, the goal is to connect small and mid-sized businesses in Central Maryland to a competent, capable workforce, providing staff training and ongoing supports. The program is set to start in April. Find more information on the HCAS website at <https://howard-autism.org/autism-hiring-program/>.

Guest Presentation: Betsy Hein, Assistive Technology Program Manager, Accessible Resources for Independence

Information was shared on the Maryland Technology Assistance Program (MTAP), the Assistive Technology Financial Loan Program, the Maryland AT Reuse Center, the Independent Living Assistive Technology Program, and ARI's AT Grant Program. Please see attached presentation. For more information, please contact Betsy at behein@arinow.org.

Closing

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 a.m.

Upcoming 2020-2021 Meetings:

May 13, 2021 – 8:30-10:30am (WebEx)